

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

For the

State of Delaware, Division for the Visually Impaired

MEETING MINUTES

February 13, 2017

9:30am - 1:00pm

Location: Smyrna Rest Area

5500 DuPont Pkwy. Smyrna, DE 19977

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kevin McAllister, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:45am.

II. ROLL CALL

Kevin McAlister (Chair), Blake Roberts (Co-Chair), Elisha Jenkins (DVI Director, Member), Dava Newnam (DVI Deputy Director), Sonya Lawrence (Member), Deborah Bradl (DVI), Debbie Harrington (Member), Shirley Bryson (DVI), Grisel Espinosa (DVI), Lloyd Schmitz (Teleconference, Public), and Susanne Howell (Teleconferenced, Member).

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Joint Finance Committee – Ms. Harrington raised concerns about the lack of communication among the council members/agencies. She shared concerns about the task force recommendations and ensuring that the entire council was working toward the same common goals. Mr McAllister asked if DVI had moved forward with any of the Task Force recommendations that came out last year. Ms. Newnam stated that a week prior DVI submitted to legislation for a 14 to 1 student to teacher ratio. Mr. McAllister asked why this information was not shared with the council. Ms. Jenkins stated one reason is the timeline and the transition to a new administration was another factor. Ms. Jenkins stated that the legislation was the same information that was submitted last year

under Gov. Markell with some minor revisions. Ms. Harrington asked why other recommendations such as the 12 month entitlement were not submitted. Ms. Jenkins stated that DVI did not address the other recommendation because of the change in the administration and the council. Ms. Lawrence stated that everything is still connected to title 14 and this may confuse the legislators because legislator may think that the only priority may be 14 to 1 student to teacher ratio. She stated that DVI's policy person collects the proposed legislation from all of the Divisions and forwards that information to the governor's office. Mr. McAllister asked the time restraint was the reason there was only one recommendation. Ms. Jenkins explained that timing had a lot to do with what was submitted. She stated that this submission of other legislation would be forthcoming and that DVI wanted to at least put the student to teacher ratio on the radar as a foundation to be able to submit additional requests later. Ms. Harrington stated that there was a huge missed opportunity. She would have liked to see the some other items such as the Entitlements, State-wide Accountability Officer, and braille language submitted. She was concerned that we have given the new Governor the impression that student to teacher ratio is the only priority.

Mr. McAllister asked what DVI's assessment and what the next steps are. Ms. Jenkins stated that two items were requested. One was analyzing what it would take to have a program that would meet the needs of the blind and visually impaired students. The other action item was to provide the teachers' salaries for the surrounding states and to determine if there were any loan forgiveness programs for teachers. Mr. McAllister asked if the Task Force had gathered any information. Ms. Harrington replied that although the items were talked about, the information was never formally gathered in a document. Ms. Lawrence added that Dawn Jackson was gathering that information and she was looking into a program with U of D to train teachers at one point. Ms. Jenkins stated that she did gather that information and submitted it to

leadership. It was determined by that data that we are competitive in regards to salaries.

Ms. Lawrence stated this may be lack of information sharing and different perspectives. She ask that moving forward if DVI could incorporate more of their advocate's perspectives in future decisions. Ms. Jenkins responded point taken. Ms. Harrington reiterated the importance of being on the same page before speaking with the Governor or the Legislators.

IV. NEW/SPECIAL BUSINESS

A. Annual Retreat/Town Hall Meeting – Mr. McAllister sent out a draft that he created based upon previous retreats with a few new ideas. He put together a skeletal agenda with some key topics and individuals that we should engage. He asked for feedback from the council regarding the draft agenda. He recommended that we move forward with the planning of the retreat. There were no concerns from the members about what was presented in the draft document. He stated that he would move the retreat to Dover Downs because it is an accessible location. He stated it was a great location for a town hall meeting. Everyone agreed on the location.

Mr. McAllister discussed the agenda for Friday, March 17, 2017 9 am to 12 pm. He recommended we invite different agencies to come out to present. Ms. Lawrence suggested reaching out to the airports. Ms. Howell also agreed that someone from the airport or TSA would be a great addition. He stated as of now DVI-VR, DART, Amtrak, and BAA would be on the draft agenda. Ms. Lawrence recommended inviting someone from the SSA to come out and speak about SSI & SSDI. Mr. McAllister stated that if anyone thinks of any other agencies to invite please get in touch with him via email as Unemployment Insurance quickly as

possible. At this time Mr. Lloyd Schmitz joined the meeting as person from the public.

It was recommended that from Friday, March 17, 2017 from 12pm-2:30pm there will be a meeting with the DHSS Secretary, DVI Leadership, and ISO (Ms. Jenkins would make that request). As a back-up plan, Ms. Lawrence recommended that the local Blind and Visually Impaired Groups (such as GAC, Blind-Sight DE, NFB, ACB, BEP/ BVC, DIB, and VRAC) have a panel discussion about who they are and what they do for the community.

It was also recommended that from 3pm-5:00pm training and strategic planning session be scheduled. Mr. McAllister ask the group to submit recommendations for training to him as soon as possible. Trainings and strategic planning would be scheduled for Saturday, March 18, 2017. Some recommended training for Saturday, March 18, 2017 were education, employment, independent living and transportation. There was discussion among the members about the size of the council and splitting the council into smaller groups for these trainings. The council members suggested having VR Counselors come out on Saturday to provide a day in life of a VR Counselor.

Mr. Schmitz asked if the VRAC was looking for new members. Mr. McAllister stated that the council is always looking for fresh ideas and new members.

B. *Healthy Vision Month* – Ms. Jenkins stated that on Thursday, May 18, 2017 from 5:00 -7:00pm the Delaware Children’s Museum has offered for children to come in for \$2.00/child for Healthy Vision Month. The members discussed ways to divert the \$2.00 fee for children in our program.

C. *White Cane Day* – White Cane Day will be held on Monday, October 16th, 2017. Dover Downs was recommended as the

location. Ms. Lawrence proposed presenting an award in honor of Ms. Deborah Briddell that would be funded by the council.

V. DVI

DVI-VR Administrator Report – Submitted by Shirley Bryson, District Administrator, and Division of Visually Impaired District Administrator.

VR Summary:

In fiscal year 2016 DVI VR had 30 successful closures (individuals employed over 90 days).

As of February 10, 2017, the current VR caseload is 280. The number of successful closures FY 2017 is 6 (employed more than 90 days). A review of the caseload reflects that 22 individuals are ready to work and 6 individuals that are currently employed (less than 90 days). Finally, there are 61 individuals that are currently in training or a higher education program.

Also, DVI-VR has approximately 98 transition age students (age 14 – 21) and 120 transition age students that are (14-24).

Closures

There were 20 closures since new fiscal year (6 closures that achieved employment, 5 who we could not locate, 2 who were not in compliance, and 8 who are no longer interested in services).

Closure Reason	Comments
0 - Achieved Employment	Amazon, Warehouse \$13.50 hourly and benefits

Outcome	
	Division of Children, Youth and Families (Protective Services) Mobile Therapist/Soc. Worker, \$39,000 annually and benefits.
	Perkins Academy, Café worker/chef, \$18.80 per hour and benefits
	Home Depot, Warehouse, \$11.00 hour
	Wawa ?
	JP Morgan Chase, \$ 33.90 hour and benefits
1 - Unable to Locate or Contact	5 consumers
13 - All Other Reasons	2 Consumers failed to follow up after months on providing appropriate documentation.
3 - No Longer Interested in Receiving Services	Consumer stated to VRC that he wasn't interested in employment at this time but wanted to volunteer somewhere. VRC referred consumer to the Senior Corp and RSVP at the Wilmington Senior Center. VRC informed consumer to contact DVI VR when he is ready for employment. Mr. Burton stated that he would.
	Was not interested in employment at the time.
	Was dissatisfied with VR Counselor. Thought all other services were good.
	Was not interested in employment at the time.
	Parent refused services will be sending consumer to day program.

	Consumer notified VRC that his living situation was not good at this time and would have to resume services at a later time.
	Was not interested in employment at the time.
	Would like to be a BEP operator. But not until next year because of some personal obstacles.

Parent Information Session (FAQ)

On January 26, 2017 at 6:00 pm DVI-VR hosted a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Parent Session about transition from high school to work/college and DVI's role in the process. Some individuals were on-site and others called in. There were approximately 5 families participate and approximately 2 transition professionals. The discussion topics included:

How to Navigate the Education System;
 Technology Needed For Education & Career;
 Fostering Independence including use of public transportation;
 High School graduation requirements and access to the curriculum;
 Accessibility in the school environment;
 Preparing students for college or work;
 Developing a career plan and;
 Employment Opportunities

The next Parent Information session will be held on Wednesday, February 22, 2017. The topic will be College & Career Opportunities.

BEP Orientation

BEP Orientation took place on January 11, 2017, from 10:00 am to 12:00 am. The locations included New Castle County, Biggs Building, Smyrna Rest Stop, and Milford (Child Development Watch). There were approximately 16 interested consumers. The BEP timeline was provided to the participants. Starting from January 31, 2017 to June 1, 2017.

Partnerships this period include:

- Adecco (Staffing Agency)
- Marbles
- Staffmark
- Habitat for Humanity NNC
- Greenhill Pharmacy
- Faithful Friends
- Ujima Afterschool Program
- Integrity Staffing (Employment Agency)
- Two Men and a Truck (Moving Company)

DIB

DVI's Vocational Rehabilitation team facilitated this event in order to promote and identify employment, training, and educational, opportunities for Delaware Industries for the Blind staff.

Paul Beane from Ability Network of Delaware provided an overview of the services that (AND) offers. He mentioned that his organization works as a sub-contractor for temporary assignments, document destruction, and janitorial services. He

engaged the audience by getting an idea of their current employment goals and transferable skills to see where they may be a good fit. He asked for Business Consultants to send resumes of individuals who may have an interest in the above mentioned positions.

Shannon Lolley (Unemployment Insurance) and Helene Keeley (Employment & Training) from Department of Labor (DOL) gave an overview Unemployment Insurance and Employment and Training. Unemployment Insurance discussed the importance of not filing for benefits until your last day of employment. It is mandatory for an individual to register with Employment and Training should they apply for Unemployment Insurance but the individual does not have to be a recipient in order to apply. Employment and Training will assign counselors based on individual requests as it relates to training and/or education needs. Ms. Shannon Lolley shared how to utilize career ladders and provided a tour the joblink website. Both representatives shared their power point presentation. Cereza Hansley, Business Consultant, distributed the presentations via email to all Delaware Industry for the Blind staff. The next steps, are the Business Consultants will continue to meet with assigned DIB consumers to assist with career development and employment opportunities. The Business Consultants will assist anyone with registering with Employment and Training upon request

Consumer Success Stories

Christy Bazemore, VR Counselor was able to get one of her consumers a scholarship to attend the Life Conference.

One of our long-term consumers has finished her certificate classes and is looking to take 3 more certificate classes.

One of our consumers has reported that she received all A's at Wilmington University this past Fall 2016.

New Intern & Employee

Grisel Espinosa is the new Administrative Specialist for Milford. She comes from the Division of Public Health and has several years' experience in administrative support.

VR has three new interns:

Geraldine Magana is from Delaware Technical Community College, Wilmington Campus. She is bilingual and is working on her Human Service Degree. She is working with the Transition Counselor at the Holloway Campus.

Melissa Lewis is from Delaware Technical Community College, Terry Campus. She works in the Milford office

Devon Tapp is a University of Delaware intern. She is working on her degree in Health Science. She is in the Biggs office at the Holloway Campus.

A.ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Lloyd Schmitz asked about the pathways program. Ms. Bradl explained the program to Mr. Schmitz. He also asked about the education numbers. He also asked if all of the TVI's are in the Department of Education DEEDS system. Ms. Jenkins responded that until she receives access to DEEDS she cannot verify information.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McAllister adjourned the meeting at 12:35pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Mangini

